

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 14, 2016

Agenda Item: 2016 Late Season Waterfowl Seasons/Closures

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

Background

For ducks, geese, swans, and coots, Montana is in both the Central and Pacific Flyways and follows U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) frameworks based on winter and breeding population status for geese and May population and habitat surveys for ducks. The FWS has started setting regulations earlier, so Montana FWP is also moving its schedule earlier, with proposals in February and final action in April. The proposed seasons are for the maximum number of hunting days allowed by the FWS. In order to stay within the limit for the total number of days yet allow for late-season hunting, both flyways have short closures within the seasons thus creating “split” seasons. There are two hunting zones within the Central Flyway for ducks and geese. The Commission has already approved a change for the Central Flyway duck zones, adding Yellowstone and Carbon Counties to the existing 5 counties (Big Horn, Treasure, Rosebud, Custer, and Prairie) to form a 7-county zone (Zone 2) that matches goose Zone 2.

Proposed season dates are similar to 2015-16 dates except for the calendar progression that moves them two days earlier (opening October 1 instead of October 3). Proposed dates are as follows:

Pacific Flyway - Ducks, coots, and geese: October 1 - January 8 and January 14-18 (except scaup season closing December 25); Swans: October 8 - December 1

Central Flyway - Ducks and coots: Zone 1 - October 1 - January 5; Zone 2 - October 1 - 9 and October 22 - January 17; Geese - Zone 1 - October 1 - January 8 and January 14-18; Zone 2 - October 1-9 and October 22 - January 25; Tundra swans: October 1 - January 5. A bonus teal season October 1-9 in the CF would allow hunters to take 2 additional blue-winged teal.

Duck, coot, and goose daily bag and possession limits are proposed to be the same as in 2015-16.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period ran from February 11 to March 18. We received 11 comments that spoke to wanting the season to run later, not liking the split zones in the Central Flyway, wanting a spring snow goose season, and concern about the take of trumpeter swans.

Alternatives and Analysis

No alternatives were considered.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the commission approve the proposed 2016-17 late season migratory bird regulations as presented by FWP. The proposed seasons are within the frameworks established by the FWS.

Proposed Motion

I move the commission approve the proposed 2016-17 late season migratory bird regulations as presented by FWP.